

Report

Grand Canyon National Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Grand Canyon National Park is located on the Colorado Plateau in northern Arizona. The canyon creates a major barrier between the two primary visitor use areas on the north rim and the south rim. The south rim receives approximately 80 percent of the nearly five million annual visitors who come to Grand Canyon. The south entrance to the Park is located about 60 miles north of Williams, Arizona on Arizona Highway 64. Most visitors enter through this station, which provides convenient access to popular viewpoints along the south rim and to Grand Canyon Village, which contains most of the lodging, camping and visitor services on the south rim. The gateway community of Tusayan is located immediately south of the south entrance to the Park. Tusayan offers lodging, food service, retail outlets, and access to helicopter tours of the canyon. The south rim is also accessible through the east entrance, which is about 25 miles east of the south entrance. The north rim of the canyon is reached through its own entrance station.

The primary visitor activities at the Grand Canyon include sightseeing from the canyon rim and hiking or mule riding into the canyon interior. Raft trips along the Colorado River through the canyon are also offered by concessionaires. Most visitors spend only a few hours in the Park and the typical overnight stay is one night in duration.

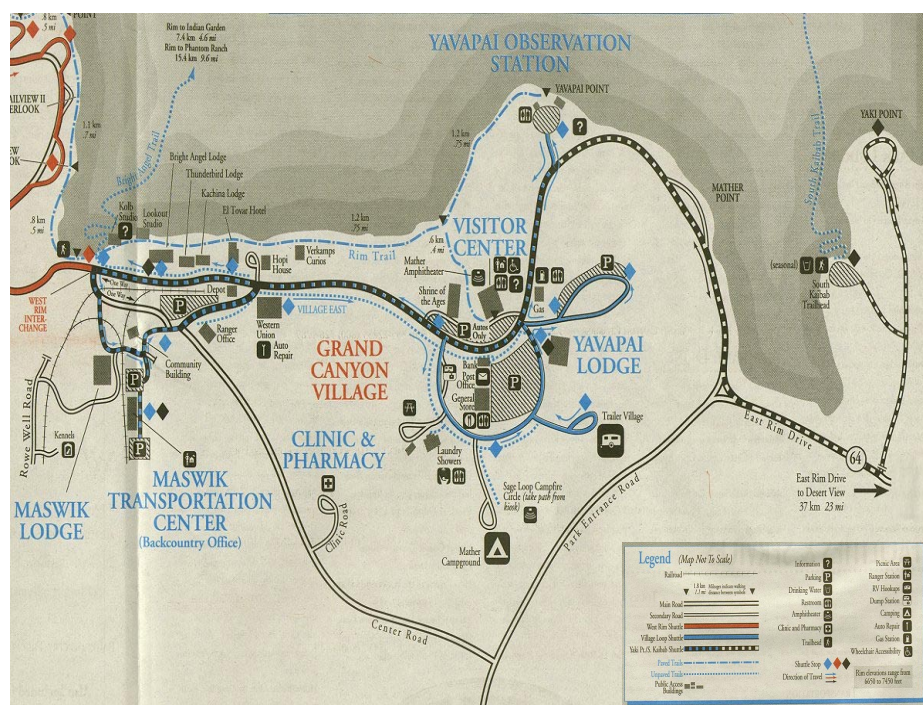


■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Visitor transportation to Grand Canyon National Park occurs in private vehicles, tour buses, shuttles from the nearby Grand Canyon Airport in Tusayan, and via a daily excursion train from Williams, Arizona to Grand Canyon Village. All of the public transportation services are provided by private operators for a profit or as part of a wider range of services. Within the Park, visitors may travel on free shuttles offered by the Park and tours operated by Amfac, the Park's major concessionaire.

The Park shuttle system is operated by a private contractor using buses owned by the NPS. Shuttles operate on routes within Grand Canyon Village and from the Village to viewpoints and trailheads along the south rim. The fleet includes bus-trailer combinations, which operate along a segment of road west of the village that is closed to private vehicles; newly acquired, natural gas-powered low-floor transit buses, and older medium-sized transit buses. The shuttle buses are well patronized in the summer months, when parking is difficult to locate and visitation is heavy. The concessionaire operates a variety of vehicles to provide its tour services, which are provided for a fee.

Figure 1. Map of the Primary Transportation Routes



■ 3.0 ATS Needs

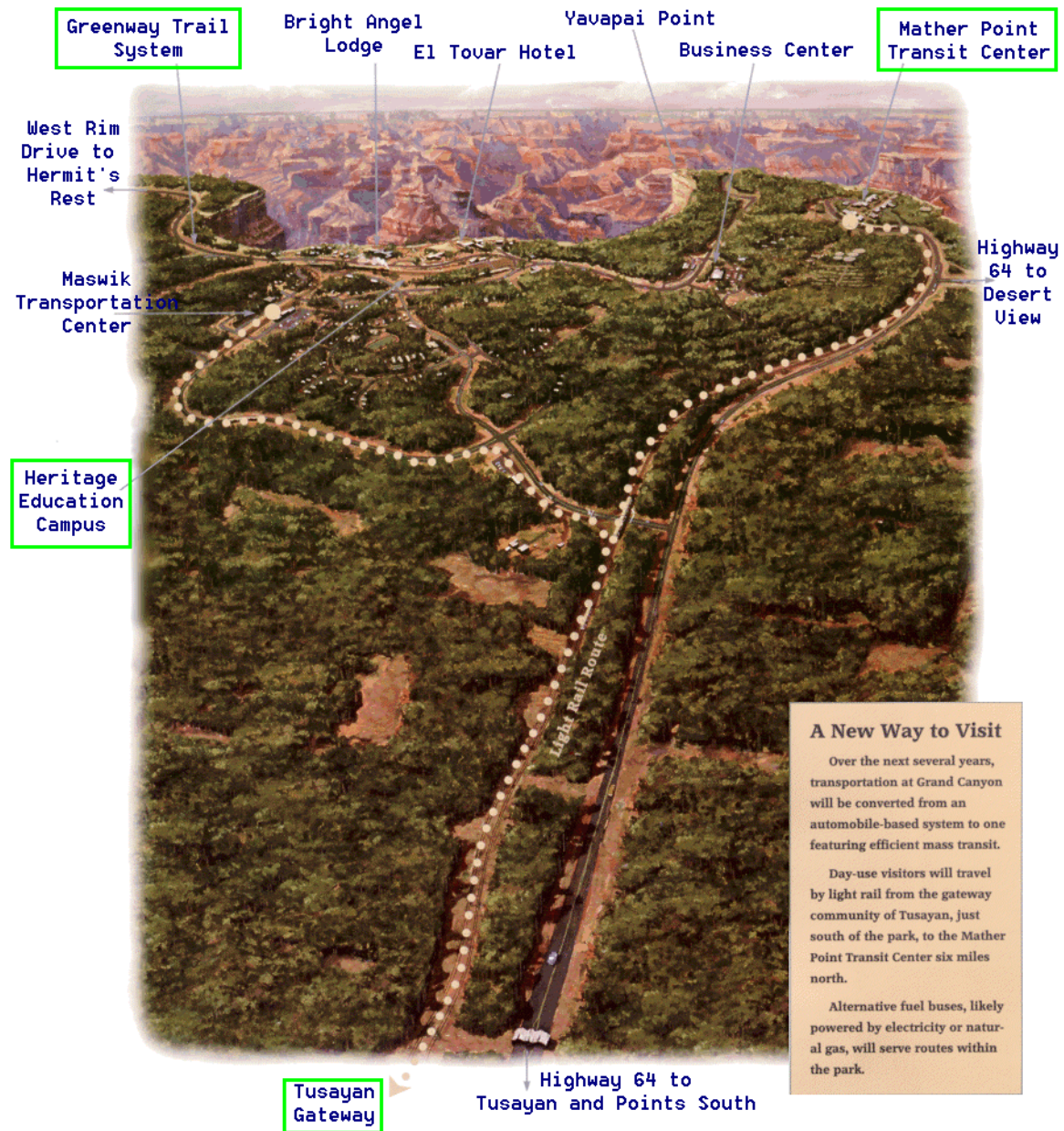
Grand Canyon National Park has adopted a General Management Plan that calls for comprehensive measures to improve the visitor experience and protect the Park's resources by modifying development on the canyon rim and by developing a visitor transportation system. The Park is already taking steps to implement the General Management Plan, including developing a new visitor contact facility near the canyon rim and making changes to the roadway system in and near the Village.

The plan calls for the development of a nine-mile, double-track light rail transit line linking a major parking area and transit center outside the south boundary of the Park to two stations near the south rim. One station will be located at the visitor contact facility that is under construction. From that station, called Canyon View Information Plaza, visitors will be able to walk to Mather Point to view the canyon and catch shuttle buses to other viewpoints and trailheads east of Grand Canyon Village. The second station will be located in Grand Canyon Village, where visitors will be able to walk to viewpoints and visitor services along the rim and board shuttles within the Village and to viewpoints to the west along the canyon rim. The station will be located next to the planned Heritage Education Center, which will provide interpretive programs and educational opportunities related to the cultural and natural features of the Park.

All day visitors to the south rim will be required to use the light rail line to reach the canyon rim. Tour buses and other transit vehicles carrying day visitors would stop at the transit center and transfer their passengers to the LRT line. Visitors staying in Park lodging or campgrounds would be able to drive to their accommodations and then would have to leave their vehicles parked while visiting the area.

The estimated capital cost of the proposed transportation system is up to \$150 million. Operating costs of about \$20 million per year are expected. The Park plans to implement the transportation system through a concession contract. The successful offeror will be required to finance all aspects of the system, including design, construction, operations and maintenance. It is expected that the cost of the system will be funded by user fees collected by the concession contractor.

Figure 2. Planned Light Rail System



■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Like other major western parks, Grand Canyon experienced rapid growth in visitation throughout most of the 1980s and early 1990s. The volumes of private vehicles entering the Park have overwhelmed the parking areas at the major viewpoints and in Grand Canyon Village. Roadside parking is causing damage to resources and it is exposing visitors to unsafe conditions as they walk along the roadsides to their destinations. Visitors are confronted

with an overwhelming presence of vehicles of all types, which is detracting from the experience of the canyon views. Also, visitors are frustrated by an inability to locate parking spaces, with many visitors circulating through the village repeatedly in search of parking. There is little ability to expand existing parking lots or to create new lots near the visitor activity areas without unacceptable damage to the resources and to pristine views. A consolidated parking area that is easy to find and efficient to use for day visitors is needed. The best location for that parking facility is six miles south of the rim near Tusayan. High-capacity Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) are needed to bring visitors to the major attractions on the rim and a complimentary system of expanded shuttle bus services is needed to distribute visitors to destinations along the rim.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

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